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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



CONTENTS

NOVEMBER MCMXXXI

RECENT PLAYS : BY PERCY
ALLEN / TOLSTOY AND
SHAKESPEARE : BY EDWARD
GORDON CRAIG / MARIE-
ANTOINETTE AND HER
THEATRE / THE AUDIENCE:
BY EDWARD LEWIS / EIGHTY
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DRAMA

VOL. 10

NOVEMBER MCMXXI

NUMBER 2

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

RECENT PLAYS

By Percy Allen

VISITORS to this year's Malvern Festival were surprised by the success of the 16th century Morality, "Hick Scornier;" and now playgoing opinion has decided that the 19th century Morality, in melo-dramatic form, "East Lynne," was the best entertainment yet put on by Misses Helena Pickard and Beatrix Thomson, at the Grafton Theatre. Intellectually on a level with such lines as "He is dead, and has never lived to call me mother," why did the play neither raise laughs—no more, I mean, than reason—nor provoke a riot in the theatre? The secret, I suppose, must be, that such a comedy, in itself unreal, provides real acting parts, and atones in ethical charm, and in symbolical and social-historical interest, for all its aesthetic and other deficiencies. The naked human drama, competently presented, breaks through.

Mr. John van Druten, casting about him for a theme, whispered; "If I can't think of anything else, I'll write a love-story." Well, he couldn't—not at the moment—so he contrived an idyll for Edna Best and Herbert Marshall, "There's Always Juliet," with no tale at all in the whole of it, except that a man met a woman, and loved her. In certain degrees of art, admittedly, 'tis less the thing itself than the manner of the thing that tells, yet for all that, if you are a prosaic person, and exigent concerning plot and ideas, you had better avoid the Apollo for a while: but if, like myself, you are a romantic, secretly yet incurably sentimental, and able to derive pleasure from love-scenes competently written, and played with appealing truth, humour, and tenderness, you had better go there quite soon.

Simplicities in spate! Another of them is

Mr. Bax's story of "The Immortal Lady," who contrived an escape in woman's disguise of her Jacobite husband from prison. The play opened weakly; and when, after more than an act, it still failed to grip, I became needlessly apprehensive; and forgot, for a few minutes, how skilled is this dramatist in his art; though I remembered again, when we had seen the second act, finish strongly, and knew that the third was going to prove the most tense, by far, of the three. Mr. Bax, nevertheless, works, I think, more happily in a Latinised than in an English setting; for the people in "The Venetian," were more vivid to me than were any in this piece, excepting only the Venetian Ambassador, admirably played by Mr. Alan Napier. As a thing of stage-craft, "The Immortal Lady" is happily adroit; and Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson, in the title part, captured and charmed her audience.

Mr. Oliver Baldwin dreamed a dream concerning the gathering of God's elect, the twelve apostles of to-day—a fine idea, which, in the hands of a really competent dramatist, might have produced something big. Mr. Baldwin, however, is not yet that. Reversing Mr. Bax's much sounder process, he has written an admirable first act, sound in characterization, neat in dialogue, full of atmosphere; but the second act weakens, and the third falls, because the author has not woven his allegory into his play, and has neither told us why males of the first century become females of the 20th; nor, excepting Judas, how we may individually identify the twelve. Surely we should have heard, jingling upon the person of St. Peter, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven!

RECENT PLAYS

Of this month's plays, Mr. Bridie's "The Anatomist" seemed to me much the best. Original in idea, and powerful in execution, despite a weak third act, this study in the macabre reveals a dramatist who will be watched. Weary though I was with much playgoing, this drama pleased me greatly, as also did its interpreters, from Mr. Ainley downwards; and it was good to know that Mr. Anmer Hall, at his new Westminster Theatre, has made so distinguished a start. I should like, if I could, to say as much for "Elizabeth of England," at another new theatre, the Cambridge; but I cannot. The play, though competently written, finely acted, and decoratively staged, falls, somehow, between the stools, or schools, of Mr. Strachey

and some others. There were moving moments, especially when Elizabeth and Philip were the centres of two simultaneously acted episodes upon the stage: but—granting that Shakespeare himself practised it—the trick of transforming history into "Legend" is always dramatically dangerous.

Talking of Shakespeare, may I remind readers of "Drama" that, at Sadler's Wells, Mr. Ralph Richardson nightly, thoroughly, and with the utmost zest, tames a curst Shrew (Miss Phyllis Thomas); and, since identifications are topical these days, may I inform all who care to know it, that Shakespeare's shrew, historically, is in my judgment Lady May Vere; her tamer being Lord Willoughby de Eresby, whom she married in 1578.

TOLSTOY AND SHAKESPEARE

By Edward Gordon Craig.

TOLSTOY was a teacher of ethics. Mr. Fulop-Miller, in his recently published volume, "New Light on Tolstoy," (Harrap, 15s.), reminds us of "the immense influence that Tolstoy's ethical ideas have lately come to exercise, not only in India, but throughout the world." Just previous to this, he informs us that it is owing to Tolstoy's doctrines that Gandhi has been able to "realize on a grand scale his programme of passive resistance," and generally to upset us in England, and so forth. It seems that when Gandhi was in Africa he used to write to Tolstoy, and once "declared himself to be a faithful disciple of the Sage of Yasnaya Polyana." After that, they had a lengthy correspondence.

Calling his book "New Light on Tolstoy," Mr. Fulop-Miller gives us some reminiscences not previously published—but they are all like the old reminiscences, full of fret and fidget.

Tolstoy was one of the dramatists who, at the end of the nineteenth century, preached Doubt and Disaster from the stage, and thereby depressed millions of spectators, and, I believe, did much to bring about disaster. Other dramatists stormed better, or laughed with more cackle—but none worried so well as Tolstoy.

Having read all about him, and his books, and thinking for long about him, one wonders how it was that he never did one of the two things which he could so easily have done. Why did he not create, as an artist does, some one unforgettable verse, play or essay, starting a new thought free from ethical, political or any other insoluble problem—which, maybe, has never been solved except through bloodshedding? Or why, when he was thirty, and had done quite enough thinking, and had come to some splendid conclusions (and had come, by the way, to look rather like a gorilla)—why did he not rise up and seize Russia by the scruff of the neck, and shake it and bring it to its senses, as Mussolini has done to-day with Italy?

I wonder why he never did either of these two things—for, failing that, to my mind he seems to have done nothing whatever. Plenty of people there are who can write novels and plays as good as his best; and there are plenty who can lead better lives than this worried, religious old gentleman, always fearful of crossing the road, lest by chance Marianne should come round the corner at that moment, and he did not know what on earth to do to save his immortal soul.

Those who remember Sir James Barrie

TOLSTOY AND SHAKESPEARE

play, "Walker, London," will remember the glorious gag that Toole, as *Jasper Phipps*, used to utter over and over again: "Sarah . . . I'm slipping!"

Tolstoy is for all the world like Jasper.

I don't think that Tolstoy's pupil, Gandhi, would ever talk like that.

I don't want my ethical teachers to be like that—I had far rather they plunged, and taught me the ethics of plunging . . . anything, rather than this weak and idiotic preaching about what is not and never will be practised. Because preaching about the immortal soul, unless it is on the ancient traditional lines—the result of centuries of careful thinking—influences people in a very bad way. If you preach about how to make a new kind of shoe, the talk cannot hurt anybody—the shoe will, and there's an end of the shoe, for a shoe that pinched never was a success. Whereas an ethic that pinches is, for some infernal reason, a terrific success.

Tolstoy's ethics pinched him, and pinched some of us, for years and years; but he was so dogged, he wouldn't say where they pinched: we have had to discover for ourselves—and what a time it has taken us, and what a lot of trouble it has given us!

There is one peculiar symptom which reveals the ethical trouble right away. He who is bitten, if a writer, will before long be asserting that Shakespeare does not know how to write. The moment you spot this, you may be sure that he has got the ethics badly.

In 1907 Tolstoy, writing to a friend, says:

" . . . Of one thing I am absolutely certain: not only the majority, but all the plays ascribed to Shakespeare (Hamlet, etc., not excepted) are quite undeserving of the extravagant praise which is generally bestowed upon them. From an artistic point of view, indeed, I should rather describe them as beneath criticism."

The obvious excuse that will be offered is that he only read Shakespeare's plays in a vile translation: but Mr. Fulop-Miller tells us that Tolstoy had three thousand volumes in English in his library of fifteen thousand books, so doubtless Shakespeare would be read in English.

The fact is that while Tolstoy was, presumably, something of an artist, by 1907 he had entirely lost all knowledge of what "an artistic point of view" meant. It is a strange thing,

but even to this day most of the "slippers" do think that way, and their hearts bleed for Shakespeare at every other word, as they realize what an awful risk their dear brother was continually running.

In the same letter in which Tolstoy makes this astounding statement about Shakespeare being "from an artistic point of view . . . beneath criticism," he bewails the fact that " . . . the gigantic Press system of to-day" has rendered everyone equally devoid of judgment, and tends "to produce idiots incapable of thought or art in ever-increasing numbers"; and says that "When a man begins to talk on every imaginable subject without stopping, and without reflecting . . . it is a certain indication of incipient or actual mental disorder." And going on, he adds that "if the patient is convinced that he knows better than anyone else, and that it is his mission to impart his wisdom to the others, then there is no further doubt about the matter."

Who was he thinking of? Could he by any chance have entirely forgotten himself for a moment? For all these reformers—Knox—Calvin—Wilberforce—Tolstoy—Shaw—"talk on every imaginable subject without stopping," and are "convinced that they know better than anyone else."

I refer to Mr. Shaw because he, like Gandhi, was one of those with ethical ideas who wrote to Tolstoy. I remember coming across a long letter from Shaw to Tolstoy in the Italian Press some years ago: it must have been a good column-and-a-half; and after it came about half-a-dozen lines from Tolstoy, telling Shaw not to be quite so flippant in the way he expressed his ethical ideas.

Tolstoy's reference to "the gigantic Press of to-day," which has taught the people to greet Shakespeare as a great writer, as a wonderful artist, and as a very wise man, is not very apt—for he seems to forget that the English people held the same opinion of Shakespeare in the time of Elizabeth, before there was a single newspaper in existence.

I, as a humble admirer and far-off disciple of Shakespeare, should certainly not call Tolstoy or G. B. S. "beneath criticism"—I think they are very open to criticism, and I am wondering what criticism will be able to offer in excuse for them, thirty or forty years from now!

TOLSTOY AND SHAKESPEARE

I have never understood why it is that Law and Order lets these ethical teachers reach the age of forty without employing them. Instead, it allows them to send their voices all round the world, spreading these dangerous doctrines, and generally upsetting the apple carts of the whole bazaar. Cannot Law and Order see that these teachers possess that glorious thing, dynamic energy? and cannot Law and Order put that energy to any use? Law and Order must have an uncommon lack of observation and of resource, to fail to employ such dynamic energy.

I have a little bit of energy myself, and they tell me that through my teaching and preachings in my books, I have upset the Theatre of to-day: but upsetting a Theatre may do it good—it is like upsetting a favourite old hatbox in which you find crumbs—but it is

not dangerous to anyone . . . whereas upsetting a whole nation's beliefs is very dangerous.

If everybody's energy were concentrated on some small problem, limited in its range, energy would then be functioning in a safe and useful way. A man who concentrates as Jesse Boot did, for example, does a very great service, I think: a man who concentrates on making a perfect stylographic pen serves us all in a first-rate manner: a man who concentrated the whole of his existence on inventing motor cars which were incapable of making a noise, would be an angel.

These are the true, serious ethical people: but those other fellows are, I'm quite sure, like Mr. Toole out on the house-boat—slipping all the time, and terribly afraid of Sarah.

MARIE-ANTOINETTE AND HER THEATRE

By Francis Dickie.

WITH the completion in October of restoration work on the "Little Theatre" of Queen Marie-Antoinette, and the announcement that it will again be open to the public in the summer of 1932, after being closed for 151 years, it may be interesting to note that it was during her reign that the "little theatre movement," which has had such a wide development in the past decade, really had its birth.

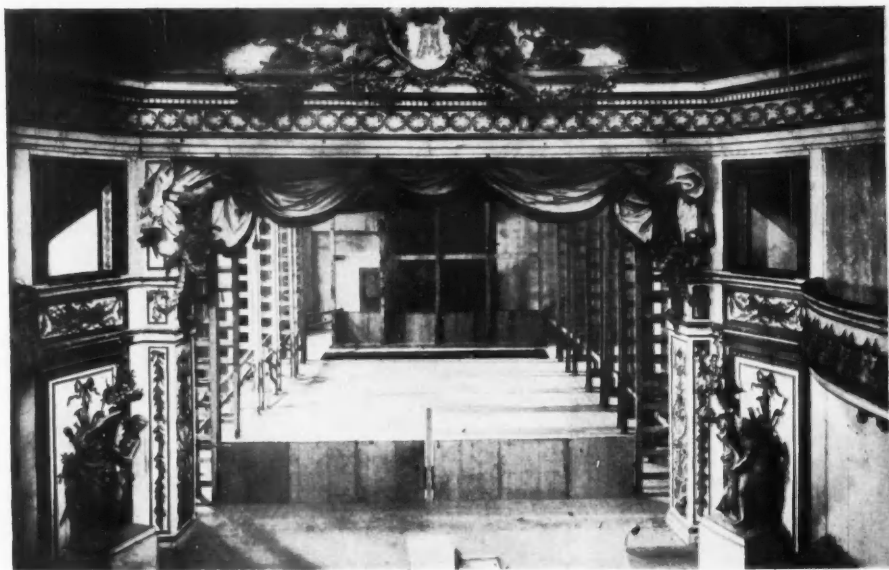
The theatre stands in the grounds of the park of Versailles, near the famous Hamlet and Dairy.

Your correspondent was the first to have photographs taken behind the scenes, some of which are re-produced elsewhere in this number of "Drama." The theatre has been restored as part of the general work at Versailles financed by John D. Rockefeller, junior. The work was begun in the summer of 1931. At this time the roof was nearly collapsed. The flooring of stage and the beautiful little auditorium were rotted away. The wall paper, all save one tiny precious bit, had disappeared. With these exceptions the theatre was in a remarkably fine state of

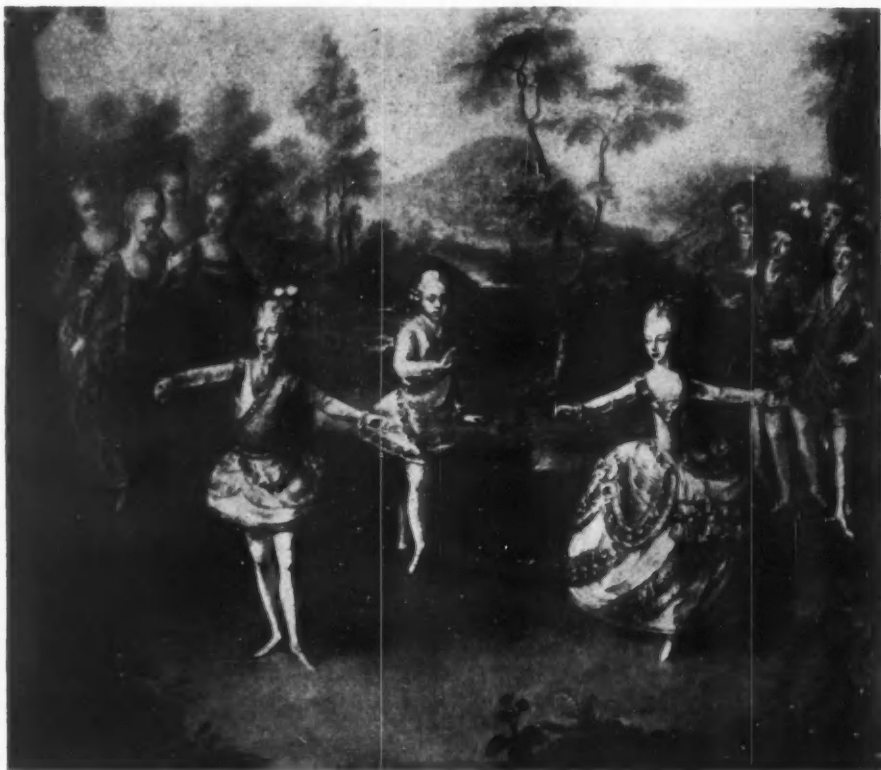
preservation. Over the stage the initials of the Queen still showed brightly. The ornamental mouldings of papier maché were still in place around the auditorium, needing only regilding.

The roof has been replaced, and a reproduction made of the painting (which had been destroyed by the elements) found in the theatre. With a new floor placed on the stage and auditorium the theatre is practically the same as on that day in May, 1780, when it was opened.

The theatre was entirely planned and supervised by the Queen, and she dealt personally with all the people engaged in its construction. The stage is a little larger than the auditorium, some forty feet in depth by sixty feet from basement to roof, and it is equipped with an extensive and wonderfully complete stage mechanism, practically all of which is in good working order. In the flyloft a series of 21 drums, some in the centre, some at the side and two from the beams of the roof, worked the ropes which ran through pulleys in the floor below to handle the extensive scenery used. Here, two heavy wooden wheels



VIEW FROM THE AUDITORIUM OF
MARIE-ANTOINETTE'S THEATRE,
SHOWING HER INITIALS ABOVE
THE CURTAIN, AND RESTORATION
OF THE STAGE.



MARIE-ANTOINETTE DANCING
IN A BALLET, AT THE AGE
OF TEN, FROM A PAINTING
BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST, IN
THE TRIANON PALACE.

MARIE-ANTOINETTE AND HER THEATRE

fastened to a plank were run over another thick plank to create the noise of thunder. At the very end of the flyloft, was a huge wooden tank once filled with water as a precaution against fire.

In the auditorium, at the right side looking from the stage, a part of the railing about two feet in length was swung on hinges creating a special exit for the king. This has now been replaced.

Marie-Antoinette from earliest childhood had been fond of theatricals. At the age of 10 she danced in a ballet given at Schoenbrunn at the time of the festivities attending the wedding of Joseph II. Oddly enough this is the only time in her life that we find her pictured in anything but the most dignified manner. That no paintings were made of her as an actress in later life, is doubtless due to the extreme privacy of these performances.

Before the death of Louis XV, while she was wife of the Dauphin, she organized some private theatricals at Versailles with her sisters-in-law. It is told that the king one day on seeing a page boy guarding a certain door swept aside the frightened youth. Expecting to find a somewhat different sight behind the closed door, the king burst in with majestic mien, only to find Marie-Antoinette, and two of his sisters at this harmless pastime.

With the accession to the throne of her husband, Marie-Antoinette in her new position commanded troops of actors from the best theatres of Paris to give performances at the Orangerie. The expense of these was very great.

It was a time of great interest in the theatre on the part of the nobility. Many of the leading families had installed private stages either in their Paris homes or in their chateaus in the country. The most noted of these at the time was that of Count de Vaudeuil at Gennevilliers where specially invited audiences applauded the talent of Vigé-Lebrun and Mme. Dugazine. It is probably this fact that stimulated Marie-Antoinette in 1779 to plan the building of a theatre that would be in keeping with her royal state.

The theatre was opened on the 20th of May, 1780 with a five act play called "Castor and Pollux." With a house of her own the Queen began to satisfy to the full her ambition. She formed a company of her close friends,

and two famous actors, Calliot and Dazincourt were hired to coach them. The actors were the Queen, the Duc de Guiche, the Count d'Adhemar, the Duchess de Polignac, the Duchess de Guiche, and several others chosen by the Queen.

For a time the performances were viewed only by the King, and his brother and one or two persons of the royal household. But even blue-blooded folks must have an audience to their playing. After a few presentations to an empty house the ladies in waiting and readers to the Queen and royal family, and the hunters of the king were permitted to fill the *loges* and auditorium. Truly a queer assembly when at the same time all the greatest nobility in France were trying to gain entrance.

Just why the Queen so consistently refused admittance to some of the most powerful people in France is still a mystery. But refuse them she did, and added by this to her already too long list of enemies in high places. Among these was the Duke of Fronsac, first gentleman of the chamber. He claimed it as his right of office not only to attend the theatre but to attend rehearsals. Both of which claims were refused by the Queen in her most amusing reply. "You cannot, my dear Duke, remain a gentleman and consort with actors."

During the summer of 1780-82 and 1783 a series of performances were given, and then only one more in 1785. The bad feeling they had created at court, and the growing unsettlement leading to the Revolution caused the theatre to be closed in 1785.

King and Queen and hundreds of the nobility went to the guillotine. The theatre, half hidden by trees in the park, was given over to decay. Bats colonised the flyloft, and made nests in the silent scenery.

But now once again it has been restored, this time by one of the royalty of dollars, and future visitors to Versailles, may see for the first time this place where a queen was once an actress.

A BEDFORDSHIRE PAGEANT

We have received the book of the "Masque of the Lady Margaret" by Miss C. L. F. Dalton, and produced for the Bedfordshire County Federation of Women's Institutes by Mrs. Katherine Pole. The Masque is well written, and narrates the history of Lady Margaret Beaufort who was born in Bletsoe Castle in 1441. The Pageant itself was a great success, and the printed version should be of interest to others desiring to produce a Masque of a similar character.

THE AUDIENCE

By Edward Lewis.

THE writing of a play is not a one-man show. The playwright has two confederates. One is the actor; and the other is the audience. He cannot afford to forget his partners. Nor can he afford to have them as sleeping partners. They do not want to be sleeping partners. As a rule, the more you give an actor to do, the better will he serve you; and the more you ask of an audience the better will it co-operate with you.

Nobody ever tells a story to himself, unless he is a jabbering idiot. He tells it to somebody. And it is a familiar fact that the telling of it depends to some extent upon who that somebody is. You may tell it to one man, and it will be a screaming success; to another, and it will be a dismal failure. Yet it is the same story; and you tell it in the same way. The fact of the matter is that the story comes to life, not in your mind merely, nor in the mind of him to whom you are telling it, but at some imaginary point between you where what you are giving to him and what you are receiving from him meet. It is the same with a play. The test of a play is whether it comes to life. The critical point where it comes to life is in the mind of the audience; or perhaps more strictly at the cross-section where the two streams of interest, from the stage and from the audience, meet. If you require proof of the vital importance of the contribution of the audience to a play, attend the dress rehearsal and first night. At the former occasion the play may be as dull as ditch-water; at the latter, a success.

The reason why a talking picture will never really take the place of a stage play—not a good stage play—is because of the conditions under which the story is presented, namely a series of photographs upon a screen; for this almost inevitably compels the audience to be a mere spectator, and inhibits its natural instinct to be a co-operator in the play. And for a similar reason I imagine that it must have been easier in Elizabethan days to bring a play to life in the theatre; for, whereas a modern audience may so easily feel itself to be a spectator looking at a picture within the proscenium frame, in those days the audience sat closely round three sides of the apron stage, and, as often as not, members of it were

in the galleries which were a part of the stage setting at the back. It is for this reason that the playwright is advised by authority to imagine his characters, not as actors upon a stage, but as real people upon a stage; that is to say, in the presence of an audience in close and intimate touch with them.

So that, even when you are writing your play, you must be aware, however dimly, of your audience in the background. The story you are writing is, even then, a tale that is being told. Now, if you will recall some of the things that madden you when a man who is a bad story-teller is telling you a story; if, for example he prosily explains every detail as if he were afraid you wouldn't follow him; or if, when the story is well under way, he says "Oh, I forgot to tell you . . ." and goes back to pick up a dropped thread; or if he lets you see the grinning face of the cat long before he lets it out of the bag; or if, when the point of the story has been made, he goes dribbling on; you will see what sort of things to avoid in writing your play.

People go to the theatre to be entertained. This does not necessarily mean to be amused. It means to be kept awake and alive and alert. You can usually keep people alive by giving them something to do. The reason why it is bad to over-write a part is because it leaves the actor little to do; you stuff him with words, and he gets sleepy. The reason why it is bad to over-write a play is because it leaves the audience little to do. You may assume intelligence and imagination in the average audience. Leave something to the imagination. Do not explain everything. They will prefer a hint to an explanation—half a loaf rather than the whole baking. Keep their minds moving, and always a little ahead of the actual moment. Keep them anticipating, expecting, even if for the moment you intend to baffle or surprise them. It is this activity of their minds and imaginations which is their entertainment; the run they seek for their money. It is the dramatic interest in your play.

What sort of an audience shall you imagine? It has been said that ninety per cent. of London theatre audiences seek amusement only; they want to rock with laughter, or to have their

THE AUDIENCE

little noses tickled with pungent odours because the pressure of life makes them faint and weary. Nobody can blame them; and there are many to cater for them. The other ten per cent., without any pretence of being highbrow, go because they like the theatre, and the art and craft of the theatre, and are entertained by the part they play in helping to create the good telling of a good story. I think that the future of the theatre lies with the ten rather than with the ninety. If the picture houses offer any threat it is to the temples of the ninety rather than to the shrines of the ten. If you take the art of dramatic writing seriously, I think you should imagine an audience drawn from this minority.

The Amateur Dramatic Movement is entitled to think that it is helping to create a good audience for good plays; perhaps a better audience for better plays. The demand precedes the supply. Shakespeare's plays would never have been written if the Elizabethan audience had not been there. The reason why his plays are not popular to-day is not merely because of the difficulty of presenting them on the modern stage—and all our revolving stages will not bring him back again—but chiefly because the right audience is not there. Perhaps, since in this world all things pass in time, he will never be popular again; perhaps it is destined that he must share his throne with another, another as great in speaking through this or the next generation as he was in speaking through his own. We do not know. Certain however it is that the new audience which is gradually growing up in all parts of the country will demand, and to that extent produce, a playwright worthy of it.

A pupil of Salvini, Vittorio Rietti, has founded the Anglo-Italian Theatre in London for the purpose of showing our serious theatre-goers the masterpieces of the Italian stage, performed in the traditional latin manner.

On Sunday, November 8th, at the Everyman Theatre Hampstead, the Anglo-Italian Theatre will present "Tristi Amori," by Giuseppe Giacosa, a famous Italian dramatist whose works offer great acting possibilities, and have met with fame in France, Germany, Russia and America. The play will be done in Italian with an English cast which includes Margaret Webster, daughter of Dame May Whitty, Hubert Langley, Serge de Kazerine, and Vittorio Rietti, who is producing.

The Anglo-Italian Theatre is under the patronage of His Excellency the Italian Ambassador, and the Headquarters are at 21, Adair Street, Portman Square.

THE WESTMINSTER THEATRE

The above theatre, which was formerly the St. James's Picture House, Palace Street, Westminster, S.W., has been transformed by Mr. Amner Hall into a luxurious Repertory Theatre. A special stage has been constructed complete with modern plaster cyclorama, and counterweight gearing to manipulate the scenery. The whole of the scheme of stage lighting has been devised by the Strand Electric and Engineering Co., Ltd. It marks a new step in Cyclorama lighting, and is the first theatre in London to be equipped with this scheme. Unlike various continental systems of Cyclorama, which consists of the use of seven different shades of colour, this new method only employs three, namely Red—Blue—and Green. By varying the intensity of these three colours upon the cyclorama plaster face it is possible to obtain any particular hue. This is largely due to the dimming apparatus, the individual units of which are wound up on a special formula devised by Messrs. C. Harold Ridge and S. F. Aldred. The equipment for lighting the cyclorama consists of a double bank of "Sunray" Battens at the top, whilst Horizon lighting is obtained by means of a double bank of specially constructed "Sunray" Magazine ground rows. This equipment throws various coloured sky effects upon the cyclorama, which, when viewed from the audience give an appearance absolutely true to nature.

The structure of the cyclorama disappears and creates the illusion that one is looking out to illimitable space. The acting area when the cyclorama is being used, is illuminated by four 1,000 watt Spot lanterns, concealed in the roof of the auditorium, whilst side lighting is obtained by means of two 1,000 watt spots concealed in the Architecture on the right and left-hand sides of the auditorium, and within 15 ft. of the stage.

The footlight is of special construction designed to give a very wide angle of light dispersion, in addition to which it is so arranged that by a simple movement it will disappear under the stage, leaving no trace of a footlight having been installed. The proscenium batten is installed for interior scenes, and this consists of a "Sunray" Magazine batten with two 1,000 watt spots mounted in the centre.

The Switchboard is of the latest design, and is complete with the new pattern "Sunset" dimmers which have been specially wound, as previously mentioned. Each dimmer is capable of individual control or of being locked to its colour shaft, and is provided with an engraved scale so that the scheme of lighting may be definitely set as regards the mixture to obtain the cyclorama effects. The dimmers are arranged on four banks and it is possible to lock the top two together to the bottom by cross connecting one shaft to the other, so that all may be operated together. In addition to this a sub-board is arranged in the prompt corner which entirely operates the spot lanterns, so that these may be under the direct control of the Stage Manager himself.

Another point in the stage equipment is a complete set of visual signals to the various cue points. The control board for these is situated in the stage manager's corner.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

A BOOK of special appeal to members of the British Drama League is the *Life of William Archer*, written by Lt.-Col. C. Archer, and recently published, with several excellent illustrations, by Messrs. George Allen & Unwin. Archer's career was many-sided, but the stage remained throughout his life his central interest, and despite years of professional dramatic criticism, his first enthusiasm never waned. This is well brought out by Col. Archer, who stresses his brother's keen support of the National Theatre which towards the end of his life filled, in some sense, the place which had earlier been taken by the propaganda of Ibsen in a country which had been at first hostile or indifferent to the works of that great master. As our readers should be aware, William Archer's important collection of theatre books now reposes on the shelves of the Drama League Library, and we are glad to commend this "*Life*" as a finely conceived tribute to one who proved himself a firm friend and benefactor of the League.

We deeply regret to record the death of Mr. Charles Ricketts, whereby we lose one of the most notable of contemporary stage designers. Ricketts was sensitively alive to the artistic movement initiated by Mr. Gordon Craig, but never entirely abandoned an older tradition of scene-painting, with the result that his work was continually in demand by producers who desired a genuinely artistic effect but a not too revolutionary one. For the same eclecticism shown by Ricketts in his painting was notable in his work for the theatre, which was always at once scholarly and atmospheric. In our next issue we shall publish several reproductions of stage designs by Ricketts, together with an appreciation of his work specially contributed by Mr. James Laver.

In response to many requests, we have prepared a double-crown poster for the use of Societies affiliated to the League, with a coloured decorative border and League emblem, but with the central panel left blank. Societies using the poster can print, or inscribe by hand, their own announcements within the limits of this panel, and the poster will thus not only emphasize their status as Drama League Members, but will endow their announcements with a publicity value which could not otherwise be obtained without a heavy printer's bill. Samples of the poster, and prices for quantities ranging from one dozen to any amount, may be had on application to the League at 8 Adelphi Terrace.

Plans for Holiday Drama Schools are now under consideration and will, it is hoped, be ready in December. The Sixth Easter School is likely to have a Little Theatre as its centre. For Summer Schools, entrepreneurs are urging the claims of Exeter, Swansea and Keswick.

Attention is called to the series of Broadcast Talks now being given by Dr. H. Du Garde Peach on "Play Producing by Amateurs" from the North Regional Station on Monday evenings in November. The practical nature of Dr. Peach's instruction should render these talks of great value to amateurs.

EIGHTY PLAYS FOR AMATEURS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

THE most surprising feature about this monster pile of one-act plays is that there is not a single one among them which deals with any of the subjects which used to be the stock-in-trade of the writers of one-act plays. There are no dialogues at one a.m. between a burglar and a self-possessed young woman flourishing a revolver which the burglar never suspects to be unloaded. Pierrot and Pierrette no longer caper archly through sickly little plays described by their authors as "moonlit fantasies." No longer do stern old gentlemen come down in their dressing gowns to surprise a crook at the safe, only to discover, at the moment when they are about to ring for the police, that the burglar is the long-lost son of the family. There are none of those dreary imitations of Mr. Noel Coward which always opened with a stage direction to the effect that "the scene is a luxuriously furnished room in a Mayfair flat." Still more surprising, there is not a single play about an escaped convict in a cottage on Dartmoor. Children are no longer expected to recite atrocious rhymed verse in the roles of those sentimental little bores the Fairy Dewdrop and the Fairy Gossamer. Even the playwrights of village life grow less conservative in their choice of subjects, no longer relying on the shadow of the workhouse as an easy method of achieving pathos, or staging cottage tea-parties to introduce the inevitable humours of William saucering his tea.

In spite of the wide range of subjects covered by these eighty plays, the general effect is one of sameness and monotony. Not more than half-a-dozen of them give the impression of having been written because the authors had something to say and decided that a one-act play was the best means of saying it. All the others have the air of being neatly and efficiently put together by authors who first decided to write a play and then thought of something to write about afterwards. The result is that a great number of these plays are merely workmanlike dramatisations of excessively trivial incidents.

Another weakness which most of them have in common is that they give little opportunity to the actor. The majority of the authors seem to think that acting begins and ends with characterisation. There is not a single "big scene" and hardly a single real "moment" for the actor in all these plays. The fact that most of them are written for the amateur may have made the authors chary of putting too much upon the actor, but actually a play which gives plenty of opportunity for real, solid acting is much easier for an inexperienced player than one which in the acting is confined to the detailed, photographic reproduction of the trivialities of everyday life.

VILLAGE PLAYS.

"The Tyrant" and "Safe Custody." By F. Austin Hyde. "A Dose of Physic" By Margaret Cropper. "A Meeting at Zoyland." By Hilda Fitch. "Here Lies Matilda." By M. E. Atkinson. "The Flood." By Maysel Jenkinson. "A Village Jumble." By V. E. Bannisdale. "Charity Begins at Home." By A. Snowball. "Nothing but his Due." By Norah Kelly. "Yes! John." By Arthur Bartle. "That There Dog." By Phoebe Reeves. Deane, 1s. each.

I am no expert on the psychology of village audiences, so I do not know whether villagers who have grown familiar, at the local cinema, with the exploits of Chicago gangsters, and the sophisticated intrigues of New York society, are still prepared to be interested in simple little stories of how Tiger, the sheep-dog, brought home the lost pig, or of how "a man has to be turble lively to get his aan way when there's two women set on giving him his Dose of Physic," or of how, in "Charity begins at Home," Farmer William Brown nearly, by mistake, gave to a gipsy an old coat with five pounds in the pocket. Anyway, I hope the modern villager is not too sophisticated to appreciate these plays, as they have very considerable charm, are briefly told, with a capital sense of the stage, and are peopled with characters who seem convincingly lifelike. "A Meeting in Zoyland" (Prize play in this year's V.D.S. competition), "A Village Jumble" and "Yes! John" all satirise different kinds of village meetings without yielding to the temptations for cheap and easy farce which the subjects present. The subject of "Here Lies Matilda" is the presentation by a deputation from the local Women's Institute to the village centenarian, and the play is saved from the obvious by an unexpected final scene. "Nothing but his Due," another prize winner in the V.D.S. competition, would, I think, be even better as a short story than as a play, but perhaps on the stage the exceptional quality of the character-drawing will atone for the lack of any real stage sense in the writing. "The Tyrant" is a very slight but rather charming sentimental trifle. More robust is "Safe Custody," a cheerful story of how the village postmistress saved the mails by breaking a packet of flour over the head of a motor bandit. The only one of these writers who has tackled a tragic theme is Miss Maysel Jenkinson whose play "The Flood" would be still more effective if a few rather stagily sentimental lines were cut out.

MELODRAMAS.

"All is Not Gold." By Frank Vosper. "What Would You Do?" By Marion Reid-Jamieson. "The Unseen Company." By Neil Grant. "At the Coach and Horses." By Anthony Armstrong. "Crook's Christmas." By L. du Garde Peach. "All Camouflage." By Mary Pakington. Deane, 1s. each. "Tear up the Joker." By Mary Pakington. French 1s.

"The Home Front." By Hal. D. Stewart. Gowans and Gray. 1s.

The authors of some of these works may not approve of their work being labelled as melodrama, but I have merely used the term as a loose and convenient classification for plays of a definitely "dramatic" type which do not come under any of the other classifications. Most of these plays are on conventional themes, treated on thoroughly conventional lines. "All is Not Gold" is an example of play-making as opposed to play-writing. It is an efficient assemblage of a number of thoroughly stagey situations liberally coated with the stickiest sort of sentiment. The result has an air of complete unreality. "What Would You Do?" which was seen at the final of last year's Community

EIGHTY PLAYS FOR AMATEURS

Drama Festival, is a play which ends at the point at which it ought to have begun. In "The Unseen Company" that reliable old stage character, the very elderly general (with a V.C. of course) becomes sentimentally confused in his mind between the past and the present. "At the Coach and Horses" and "Crook's Christmas" are two more examples of play-making according to a well-tryed recipe. I prefer Miss Pakington's grimly effective "Tear up the Joker!" to her other play, "All Camouflage," which won the play-writing competition organised by the Liverpool Playhouse Circle. It takes place "Somewhere in France," and is neither better nor worse than most of the other one-act plays with this setting. "The Home Front" is another war play, this time about Land Girls. It is an effective piece of work and the only play in this group which has the air of having been written instead of merely made.

COMEDIES.

"Merewed's Right Hand." By A. Hamilton Gibbs. "Making it Pay." By Vera Arlett. "A Matter of Choice." By William J. Farma. "A Waiting Game." By F. Morton Howard. "Billy's Wife." By Elizabeth Southwart. French. 1s. each.

"The Actress." By Vernon Sylvaine. "Twisted Smile." By Thomas Kelly. "The Referee." By W. H. Andrews and Geoffrey Dearmer. "Quartet Ensemble." By Lionel R. McColvin. "At 'The Snob Court' Hotel," and "No Smoke Without Fire." By M. E. Forwood. Deane. 1s. each.

The one-act play of to-day tends to grow briefer and more compressed, to make a single point quickly and sharply. By comparison, the first of these plays have a leisurely, rather old-fashioned air. They are comedies of situation rather than character, and in each play the situation is thoroughly and painstakingly exploited from several different angles. They are solid, competent pieces of work which will please the more convenient kinds of amateur societies and their audiences. "Billy's Wife" is set in the kitchen-living-room of a cottage in an industrial town, and both theme and characterisation are considerably more original than the hackneyed setting leads one to expect. This is a taut and effective little play written with a first-rate sense of the theatre. "The Actress," given sufficiently rapid playing and production, should prove immensely amusing. I failed to find much amusement in "Twisted Smile" as before the play is half over it is obvious how it is going to end, and neither the characterisation nor the dialogue are quite good enough to make up for the lack of interest in the situation. "The Referee" is a frankly farcical affair which takes place in the Referee's Room of a famous football club during the progress of a match. "Quartet Ensemble" is another play with an unhackneyed setting—the artists room of a concert hall. It is quick, vivacious comedy containing some neat character studies and demanding spirited work from the actors and the producer. "At 'the Snob Court' Hotel" is very much better than the crude and clumsy title allows one to suppose. It is an easy and tolerably amusing play for five women. "No Smoke Without Fire" is far more amusing, and has a highly effective curtain.

FANTASIES.

"The Cross-Stitch Heart," and "At the Junction." By Rachel Field. "Grandmother Rocker," By Tracy M. Mygatt. "The Last of the Fairies." By Francis Morton Howard. "July the Fifth." By Louis Goodrich. French. 1s. each.

"Four Fantasies" By Harold Brighthouse. French. 2s. 6d.

"Every-Woman." By Clarice M. Wilson. "You Have Your Choice." By Thomas Turner. "Posterity." By H. F. Rubinstein. Deane. 1s. each. "Card Queens." By Ernest Reynolds. Clough. 1s. 6d.

The average fantasy is apt to have a sugar-and-water flavour. It is a type of play which seems to have a fatal attraction for sentimental writers who lack the inclination to tackle the facts of everyday existence. But all the plays in this group are written with considerably more vigour and considerably less sentimentality than usual. Only three of them rely primarily on costume and setting to evoke the atmosphere of fantasy. These are "The Cross-Stitch Heart," a particularly charming little play with costumes and scenery copied from the old-fashioned samplers; "Every-woman," an unpretentious fantasy with opportunities for simple miming, which personifies Pots and Pans and Fire and Dirt and most of the other everyday things; and "Card Queens," an effectively dramatic "grotesquerie" in which the characters are the figures on a pack of cards.

Particularly charming are Mr. Brighthouse's four fantasies written to be performed in the open air, but which will also be found useful for indoor performance in places where there is no proscenium or front curtain. "At the Junction," in which a girl meets herself as she was when a child, is a trifle stodgy, but could be made effective by the right touch in the acting and production. In "Grandmother Rocker" good use is made of the idea of bringing to life a roomful of old furniture. "The Last of the Fairies" and "July the Fifth" both succeed in introducing fairy people without either sentimentality or facetiousness. "You Have Your Choice" is the dream of a girl on the night before her wedding, in which she meets three different men who are three different parts of the character of the man she is to marry. The author has avoided the obvious sentimental opportunities of the theme and written a gloriously funny fantastic farce. In "Posterity" Mr. Rubinstein brings Shakespeare, Bacon, Johnson, Boswell and Byron to the tea-party of a very arty hostess and miraculously steers clear of the innumerable temptations to farce which the situation offers. All these plays reach a sound level of excellence and are well worth the attention of amateur societies looking for plays which are not only slightly unusual but also give opportunities to the actor and the producer. They are plays which require real *acting* rather than the mere imitation of everyday life.

SCOTTISH PLAYS.

"The Homecoming," "The New Gamekeeper," and "The Tallyman." By Joe Corrie. French. 1s. each.

"The Old Maid." By Katherine T. Ray. Gowans and Gray. 1s.

"Idle Hands." By Ian J. Simpson. "Our Father." By David Clegorn Thomson. Deane. 1s. each.

EIGHTY PLAYS FOR AMATEURS

The three plays by Mr. Joe Corrie are on well-worn themes, but they are distinguished for the complete and utterly unforced reality of the dialogue and characterisation. They could easily be adapted to other dialects, as they are not written in the vernacular. "The Old Maid" is a piece of sentimentalism for six women. "Idle Hands" stands out from the plays under review because of the vigour and vitality with which the grim, swiftly-moving incident of life in a Glasgow slum is handled. It makes most of the other plays look a little anæmic by comparison. Still better is "Our Father," the prizewinner in the competition organised by "The Scottish Stage." This is a play of great dignity, remarkable for the delicacy and subtlety of the character-drawing, for the harsh pathos of the ending, and for its effective but carefully concealed theatricality.

COSTUME PLAYS.

"The Mousetrap." By J. Darmady. "Poet's Corner." By Mary Pakington. "The Arrow by Day." By Leonard Hines and Frank King. "The Question." By Marjorie Bowen. "The Dickens of Gray's Inn." By H. F. Rubinstein. French. 1s. each.
 "The Mother of Judas." By H. De Zglinitzki.
 "Witch's Brew." By Dorothy Macardie. "The Miser of Rogafjord." By Herman Ould. Deane. 1s. each.
 "Saul and David." By M. E. Kelly and E. A. Milne. Milford. 1s.
 "The Day Before Yesterday." By C. E. Lawrence. Gowans and Gray. 1s.

Fortunately few authors of costume plays now consider it necessary to dress up their dialogue as well as their characters. That quaint, fustian jargon which used to be known as "historical English," and was used with the minimum of alteration for any character from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, is only used in one of these plays, "The Arrow by Day," a stagey, melodramatic and frankly theatrical incident of the Plague, which is effective enough in an old-fashioned manner. The most original of this batch is "The Mousetrap," which takes place behind the scenes during Hamlet's play. The most highly coloured is "The Mother of Judas," a crowded, finely theatrical melodrama of Southern Spain on the night of Holy Thursday. The most charming are Mr. Rubinstein's two plays about Dickens in "The Dickens of Gray's Inn," and Miss Pakington's incident in the life of Keats. The play with the most "atmosphere" is "The Miser of Rogafjord," a play which should prove popular with many different types of amateur societies. The one with the most unusual setting is "The Day Before Yesterday," which takes place in a prehistoric cavern. The most ordinary is "The Question," a pleasant enough play, but strictly to pattern. The one I liked least is "Witch's Brew," because I am horribly bored by plays of Ireland in Early Christian times, but it is an effective play of its kind. As for "Saul and David," I suppose the general verdict will be that it is "not really a play," but nevertheless it is a finely moving piece of stagecraft which tells its story in nime extremely brief and dramatic scenes, some of which are little more than tableaux.

PLAYS FOR CHILDREN.

"Six Modern Plays." Edited by John Hampden. Nelson, 2s.
 "The Little Pagan Faun." By M. Creagh Henry. Milford. 1s.
 "Miss Ant, Miss Grasshopper and Mr. Cricket." By Rachel Field. "The Good Deed." By E. A. Beecham. "Martyrs." By Philip Wade. "Revealed to Babes." By M. Creagh-Henry. French. 1s. each.

Bad plays for children are written so that an audience of sentimental grown-ups may rapturously exclaim "How perfectly sweet!" Good plays for children are written for the enjoyment of the child actors instead of the audience. But the best plays for children are those which can be equally enjoyed by children and grown-ups. All the plays in Mr. Hampden's collection come under the last category. His authors include A. P. Herbert, John Drinkwater, Naomi Mitchison and W. Graham Robertson. "The Little Pagan Faun" is a very short play for very small children, with half-a-dozen animal characters among the cast. Miss Rachel Field's play, "with a special bow to Mr. Aesop," is particularly charming. I do not know much about the intelligence of Wolf Cubs, but I suspect Mr. Beecham of under-rating it in "The Good Deed." "Martyrs" is described as "a sketch for boys." I failed to find any merit in it. "Revealed to Babes" is an effectively sentimental Christmas "morality" for small children.

TABLOID PLAYS.

"The Old and the Young." By Louis Goodrich.
 "Three Rags." By Louis Goodrich and S. J. War-
 mington. "Three Sketches." By Gabriel Toyne and
 Herbert Jay. French. 1s. each.
 "Parlez-vous Français." By Margaret Bishop.
 "Chinese White." By D. A. Clarke-Smith. Deane.
 1s. each.

These are all very brief sketches which have been produced at the Green Room Rags and in recent London Revues. They are difficult for amateurs, as they require rapid, incisive playing and production, but most of them are well worth doing. Two of the best are "The Old and the Young" and Mr. Gabriel Toyne's "Blockheads" which was in the programme of the "Chauve-Souris" when they last visited London.

A WELCOME REPRINT

Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth's "Father Noah," which went out of print soon after its publication twelve years ago, has been re-issued in the Year Book Press series of one-act plays (Deane, 1s.). In spite of the many developments in the technique of the one-act play which have taken place since "Father Noah" was first written, it still remains a play of exceptional originality, both in its theme and its treatment. The scene when the water rushes into the Ark may frighten amateur producers who are not prepared to use imaginative make-believe as a substitute for elaborate stage machinery, but actually there are no difficulties in the stagecraft which cannot be overcome in a simple manner. This is a play which stands out from the majority of one-act plays by reason of its originality, its dramatic power, and its profoundly moving sincerity.

ST. PANCRAS PEOPLES' THEATRE

THE present moment seems a suitable one for reviewing briefly the work accomplished by the St. Pancras People's Theatre, as the removal of the company from the theatre in the building of the Mary Ward Settlement, Tavistock Place, to a new one in Somers Town marks the close of an epoch and the beginning of a new one in its history.

It was in 1922 that Miss Edith Neville approached the late Miss Maude Scott to take charge of the dramatic work of the Settlement. At that time the dramatic work in question was practically non-existent; there was a theatre with a stage of sorts, but no trained actors, no audience,—nothing but the enthusiasm of these two ladies who were, in a short time, to build up the first repertory theatre in London to put on a different play each week with a non-professional company.

Their object was to establish a community theatre which should aim at:—

1. Developing the art of the theatre within the community as a vital social force in modern life by bringing the drama within the reach of all.
2. Helping to create and maintain a well-informed public demand for good acting and good plays.
3. Developing and encouraging dramatic talent, whether for acting, producing or writing, along broad educational lines.

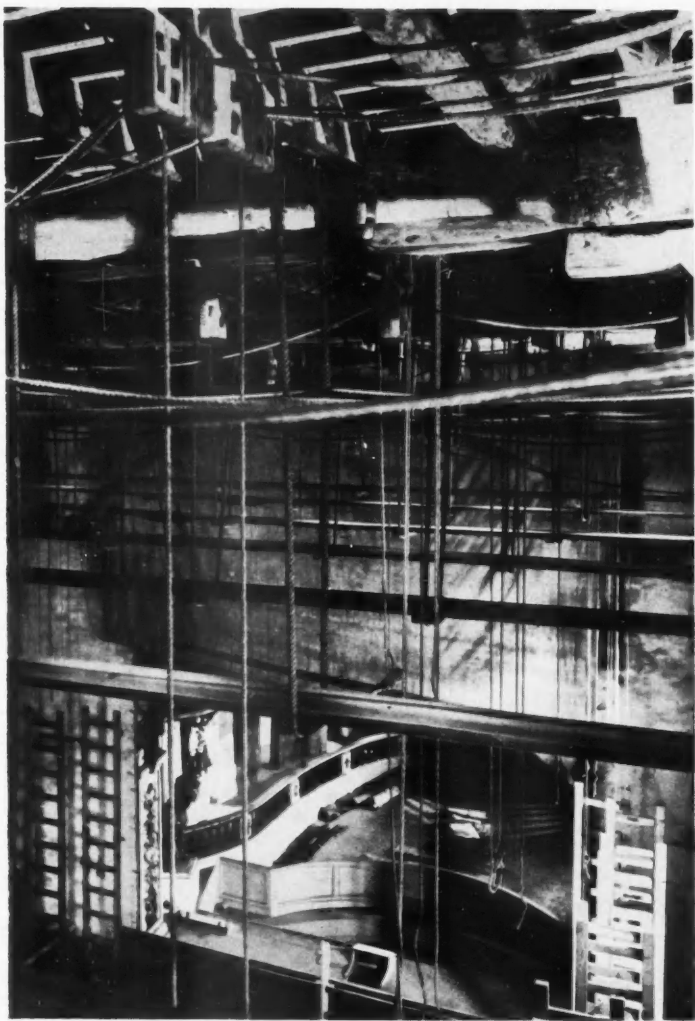
The first step was the formation of various classes for speech-training, verse-speaking, gesture and mime, as the basis of a Dramatic Art Centre, which was to be a preliminary to, and recruiting ground for, the repertory company. Interest in the drama as a social and educational force was also stimulated by means of lectures in local schools and clubs. In the summer of 1922 the Rehearsal Club of the Dramatic Art Centre gave a performance of "The Great Silence" in the garden of the Settlement; and, in addition, Miss Scott wrote and produced the Pageant of St. Pancras. Meanwhile work was proceeding in the theatre itself; the stage was made workable; a lighting plant installed by Mr. Harold Ridge; and curtains, which were to be used as a background for the plays, were hung. Early in the following year Drinkwater's "X-O," and Miles Malleeson's "Michael" were produced; and subsequently, at intervals of about three

months, performances were given of "A Royal Audience" by Terence Gray, "Sister Beatrice" by Materlinck, and St. John Ervine's "Lady of Belmont."

At first the audiences were sparse and mainly composed of friends of the actors, but gradually the quality of the productions attracted larger numbers of people, until it became possible to give regular performances with the knowledge that they would be adequately supported. Amateur actors, too, were not long in realising the advantages of the varied experience to be obtained in a repertory company, as opposed to the infrequent and spasmodic performances of the average dramatic society; and by the end of 1923 a sufficiently large repertory company had been formed, drawn mostly from amateurs engaged in business during the day. Those with little or no experience were enrolled as Student Members for small parts and crowd work, while others came to help with the costumes and properties, which were all made on the premises.

Miss Scott, with her untiring energy and genius for organisation, directed all the various activities necessary for the success of the venture, and in 1924 the St. Pancras People's Theatre was definitely established, and became a separate entity from the Settlement. The company and the audience continued to grow, and performances were given regularly on Thursdays and Saturdays for three terms of eight or ten weeks. Among the first plays to be given were "The Marriage of William Ashe," "Trelawney of the Wells," "The Mollusc," and "The Doll's House."

The primary object of the theatre was to provide performances of good plays for the inhabitants of the Borough of St. Pancras, and the prices of admission were fixed at 6d., 1s. 3d., and 2s. 4d. Shaw, Barrie and Ibsen proved to be among the most popular authors, but new work was not neglected, and several plays by members of the company were produced. A special feature was the production of religious plays during Lent, and Laurence Housman's "Little Plays of St. Francis" were given in full for the first time by an amateur company. It was as St. Francis in these plays that Maurice Evans, who was soon to graduate on to the West End stage



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN FROM THE
"FLY-LOFT" IN MARIE-ANTOINETTE'S
THEATRE, WITH A GLIMPSE OF THE
AUDITORIUM.



Photo : Ashford.

SCENE FROM "BY CANDLE LIGHT"
AS PRODUCED AT THE NORTHAMPTON
REPERTORY THEATRE.

THE ST. PANCRAS PEOPLES' THEATRE

via the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, first attracted attention.

A regular production at Christmas time was the annual pantomime, which was acted by children attending the dancing and dramatic classes, assisted by some of the adult members of the company.

The repertoire was by no means confined to modern authors,—although in arranging the programmes an effort was made as far as possible to alternate tragedy with comedy, fantasy with farce,—but a Shakespearean play and a Greek play, usually by Euripides, were given annually. Latterly Tchegov has figured in the programme, and also Hejermans, Quintero, O'Neill, and Sierra.

In the autumn of 1928 a definite link between audience and acting body was forged by the formation of a Playgoer's Club. Informal meetings were held once a month for the discussion of certain plays, and entertainments were given once or twice a year. At the same time a Theatre Magazine was published each season, in which appeared the producer's notes on the plays to be given, a leading article of topical interest, and items of news, etc.

From time to time special matinees, in addition to the usual performances, were given in aid of the Saddlers Wells Fund.

By the summer of 1929 the capacity of the theatre was taxed to overflowing at the two weekly performances, and at the beginning of the autumn season it was decided to try the experiment of an additional performance on Friday evening. This proved an unqualified success, and full houses were the rule every night. It was at this time, when the results of her work were more widely appreciated, and the difficult production of "The Rumour," by C. K. Munro, was in preparation, that Miss Scott was taken ill, and obliged to undergo a serious operation from which she never fully recovered. From then until her death in March, 1931, although she kept in close touch with the theatre, her active guidance was of necessity withdrawn; but she had laid the foundations of her work so well that it was unbroken, and continued as before, under the direction of Miss Rose Pesaro assisted by Miss Lucille Sidney.

On August 31, 1931, the lease of the Mary Ward Settlement Hall ended. It became necessary to find another theatre. After a long search this was obtained, and on October

8th, 1931, the St. Pancras People's Theatre commenced a new chapter at Charrington Hall, Crowndale Road, still in the Borough of St. Pancras, where the same company will continue the work begun in the Settlement nine years ago. As the new building has a rather larger seating capacity, performances will, for the first season, be given on Fridays and Saturdays only.

THE DUBLIN GATE THEATRE

IT has always been the proud boast of Ireland that she was a centre of art, learning and religion at a time when her neighbours across the channel were still unlettered savages clad in wode. Her epic history was sung by bards whose skill rivalled that of Homer, and the beauty of her applied arts was known throughout Europe.

Ireland's history for some centuries past has been one of tragic warfare and of bitter poverty. The most talented of her children have been forced to seek their living abroad and their gifts have enriched other lands than their own. In spite of this Dublin has never lost her love of beauty and has always been a centre for artists and craftsmen working in accordance with the best traditions.

To-day when the country has attained a measure of political freedom and prosperity and every form of artistry is receiving recognition and encouragement, it is not strange that the need should have been felt for a theatre working on the best modern lines, a theatre that should be at once the home of international art and the expansion of the peculiar genius of Irish People.

The Dublin Gate Theatre, founded to meet this need, was started two years ago in a very small way. It first saw life in a tiny theatre which had a capacity of only 102 seats. Now it is housed in a building of its own capable of holding 400 people, and it is the only theatre in Dublin where the stage can be seen from every seat in the house. The decoration of the auditorium with its gold stippled walls and red lacquered doors is both original and pleasing. The black curtain on which is emblazoned a golden gate in symbolic design is restful to the eye. The theatre has got the most up-to-date equipment, of which the light-pit and the cyclorama are striking features. The

THE DUBLIN GATE THEATRE

sets, which are designed by one of the Directors and Principals, Michael MacLiomar, are a triumph of modern theatre craft. They are simple, clear cut, well balanced and harmonious.

The Directors state that it is their policy "to provide Dublin with a theatre for the production of plays of unusual interest, and particularly of examples of the foreign theatre not hitherto presented in this city." In pursuance of this ideal the drama loving public are offered a very varied programme, and the versatility and talent of the producers and the artists are shown in the capacity to interpret so clearly the mind of playwrights of all periods and nationalities. "Peer Gynt," "R.U.R.," "Anna Christie," and "The Unknown Warrior" (Paul Raynal), have been among the plays produced at this theatre.

"Diarmuid and Grainne," revived for Horse

Show week, is perhaps a play in which the artistry and faultless production of this theatre is seen at its best. The play, which is based on an old legend of Ireland, was written by Michael MacLiomar, art director of the theatre, who played the leading role. Later it was translated by the author. The plot deals with the love of Grianne for Diarmuid the dearest friend of Fionn, leader of the Fionne, to whom she was betrothed.

The beauty and rhythm of the language needed the clear diction and musical speech with which it was rendered. The movement was exquisite, clear, and decisive like the movement of a mime and graceful and satisfying as a Greek dance. A deaf man would have missed no detail of the story, and indeed a French woman in the audience was asked if she could follow the plot. Her reply was "*moi je comprend l'action.*"

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

MR. S. Talbot Smith, president of the Adelaide Repertory Theatre, writes:—My board has asked me to supply a deficiency appearing in your March number. Mr. Pennington's interesting article on the now defunct Turret, in Sydney, states rather rashly:—"The Australian Repertory movement began in Melbourne in 1910 . . . Apart from the Melbourne Repertory, the most promising and ambitious of all these was the Turret . . . It is probable that each venture has meant a loss to its founders or shareholders."

It seems odd that he should never have heard of the pioneer in Australia, the Adelaide Repertory Theatre. We started in 1908, and have steadily marched forward. We have always been strictly amateur, and—with a struggle in War time—have always paid our way, having now funds invested, a comfortable club-and-rehearsal room, and a stage in a new hall on whose builders we were able to make requisitions to suit our purpose.

The policy has always been to show Adelaide the plays which it would not be likely to see in its commercial theatres, where the box-office necessarily controls the situation. We have given most of the modern dramatists, whether British, European, or Australian. We give five plays a year (three performances of each), and have also five lecture or club evenings, at which a short talk on some aspect of Drama is sandwiched between one-act plays that give new playing-members their chance. In this year of depression, it has been thought well to lean to the cheerful side, and the programme sketched out derives from Quintero, Monckton Hoffe, Galsworthy, Lonsdale, and Barrie.

A note on finance may be interesting to other similar bodies. The subscribers, about 700, get for their yearly guinea ten evenings as above shown.

They are allowed a week's priority in booking seats, after which the general public can book. Giving each play three times (Saturday, Wednesday, Saturday), we further take in cash from £70 to £90, or within about £30 of the actual cost. The ideal of course would be 1,000 members, leaving no room for cash-takings at all, and this seems likely to be reached in time.

REGINA LITTLE THEATRE.

The Regina Little Theatre Society was founded in 1926. Membership, which is open to all, has varied since its inception from 350 to 480. The Society's affairs are managed by an executive appointed by members in general meeting each season.

In past years, as many as 117 acting members have appeared in plays in one season. Last season the Society inaugurated a Study Group, whose weekly meetings were productive of much pleasure and instruction. Several members of this Group were subsequently asked to take part in the Society's major productions—"The Skin Game" and "The Romantic Age." Mr. Walter T. Reid is this year's President, and the Society is looking forward to a successful season.

BARROW LABOUR D.S.

This Society announces for its 1931-32 season "The Wise Blackbird," (successfully produced on Oct. 8th last), "The Skin Game" and "The Cheerful Knave." Mr. C. S. Robinson is the Secretary, and the Club is doing most useful work in spreading a love of the best drama in a district which offers few opportunities for the practice or appreciation of the art of the theatre.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

LEEDS REPERTORY THEATRE

Yet another chapter in the history of the Repertory Theatre movement was commenced on September 14th last when Miss Gwen Lally opened the Little Theatre, Leeds, with her professional company.

For many years past this Little Theatre in Cookridge Street has seen a very chequered career and had proved only too often a field of lost hopes and disappointed schemes. Miss Lally—of pageant fame throughout the land—in brief snatches of moment from her activities during the summer at Tewkesbury, was engaged in gathering her repertory company around her in order to embark on the adventurous career of establishing professional repertory in Leeds and making the Little Theatre a real home to the Theatre lovers in that northern city.

The play chosen for the opening fortnight was a little-known and almost forgotten one by Somerset Maugham, "The Noble Spaniard," an amusing comedy in the costume and manners of 1840. In that production, Miss Lally herself played the title role and added to the list of her former romantic male character impersonations.

A gathering of friends from far and near were present to give the venture a good send off. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Leeds gave a civic welcome.

Good plays, well staged and well acted is the aim. "The Noble Spaniard" has been followed by "By Candle Light," "The Young Idea," and "Charmeuse," the latter a play by Temple Thurston, only produced on one previous occasion, and others booked are "Prunella," "The Cradle Song," and "The New Morality."

Miss Gwen Lally will appear in romantic male roles whenever a costume play is staged and she is producing every play herself.

MEDWAY THEATRE CLUB

A theatre in a Solicitor's office! Frivolity encroaching upon the dry-as-dust domain of the law! But Maidstone has become familiar with the aspirations of Mr. B. J. Benson, the moving spirit of the Medway Theatre Club, and knows that he is prepared to make almost any sacrifice to promote the welfare of amateur dramatic art. He has converted the first floor, or greater part of it, of his offices at 6, Mill Street, Maidstone, a sixteenth century building in the heart of the country town, into a bijou theatre studio and clubroom.

It is an extremely cosy interior. Old oak beams frame the proscenium; the stage, large enough for a small company of players, is beneath a high skylight, invisible from the auditorium, because it is at the top of an inverted well, which houses a source of powerful, diffused lighting effects. The stage lighting effects, controlled from an elaborate switchboard in a side annexe, are very up-to-date, with special dimming devices. The auditorium has a seating capacity of about 70.

The Club was "at home" to its friends on Thursday evening, October 8th, for the opening ceremony performed by Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, supported on the stage by Mr. B. J. Benson, Director and Secretary of the Medway Theatre Club; Miss Muriel Hutchinson; and the Hon. Mary Pakington.

NOTTINGHAM PLAYGOERS

The Season's Program of the largest amateur society in Notts. and Derbyshire is just out. Apart from the regular programme, a play was given for the general public in "A Hundred Years Old" by the Brothers Quintero. The Club opened, as usual, with a Civic Reception accorded by Lord Mayor Pollard and the Lady Mayoress to the members, and followed by talks on the Paris Theatre Girls Club and the Actors Church Union work by the Local Chaplain to A.C.U. (Father Thomas, Vicar of Sneiton), A One-Acter, "They Refuse to be Resurrected" by a Club member (Mr. N. K. Smith, B.Sc.) closed the evening.

On October 26th, Mr. C. B. Purdom, (Editor of Everyman and Dramatic Critic) spoke on Modern English Drama and the Robin Hood Players appeared in a one-acter.

Emphasis is this season being specially laid on the local writer, and the night of November 9th is being devoted to such, with Mr. Downing's "Arabesque" and Mr. Wallis' "Gabriel Apollo." The Annual Award for the best local one-acter will again be given.

Miss Pickersgill (London Polytechnic) will speak on the essentials of stage technique, and will illustrate her lecture by demonstrations of her methods of mime, movement etc., in which the members will be invited to take part. Mr. Howard Partington will speak on "Some More Plays of Barrie" and a Barrie play will be given. Sir James has local interest from the fact that he was once on the staff of the "Nottingham Journal."

The Club has now an excellent little theatre in the Blue Triangle Hall where all meetings are held; it has a fully equipped stage and is quite modern.

A large number of applications for membership are again being received and should be sent to Mr. Nevil Truman, A.C.A., Moot Hall Chambers, Wheelergate, Nottingham—the Secretary.

NEVIL TRUMAN.

BATH PLAYGOERS

Mr. Horace Annesley Vachell, whose residence is at Widcombe Manor, Bath, has again consented to be President of the Bath Playgoers' Society, a progressive and successful organization that specializes in the reading of modern plays and in discussions and debates that are primarily concerned with Modern Drama and the Theatre. The Hon. Secretary (Mr. Harold Downs, "Pendennis," Combe Park, Bath) in his report presented at the Annual Meeting held during September expressed the opinion that many amateurs who believe that work in connection with productions is necessarily the highest and most valuable form of "self-expression," have not always fully exploited the inherent entertainment and educative values of play readings. Participation in play readings stimulated the imagination. The human voice, unaided by the many tricks of the producer's craft, the accessories and auxiliaries of the scenic artists, electricians, and other indispensables in production, had to suffice. The membership of the Bath Playgoers' Society during 1930-31 was the highest for years, and from the first meeting to the the average attendance was exceptionally high. Incidentally, Mr. Vachell has written a Foreword to "An Alphabet of Attributes: Aspects of Human Thought and Conduct," by Mr. Harold Downs and just published by The House of Pitman at 3s. 6d. net.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

ST. PANCRAS PEOPLE'S THEATRE.

The St. Pancras People's Theatre movement was given a church and civic blessing when it re-opened in its new home—the Charrington Hall—on October 8th. The Rev. Prebendary Metcalfe, Rural Dean and Vicar of St. Pancras, offered a prayer of dedication and did not hesitate to tell the audience that a good play preached a better sermon than he could. The Mayor of St. Pancras officially attended and spoke in support of the People's Theatre.

The new premises—in turn a church, a “Pillar of Fire” mission hall and a theatre—have been thoroughly renovated. Tip-up seats have been installed and there is now an excellent stage with curtains in good taste and a very effective lighting system. If the height of the proscenium opening were reduced, thus bringing it into better proportion to the width, it would be an advantage to all concerned. At present the actors appear to be curiously “framed” and the flies are not sufficiently hidden.

The movement has a courageous programme. The opening play, “Captain Brassbound's Conversion” (Shaw) was competently played although even Miss Amelia Cowie's modern frocks did not hide its date. Other plays in the list before Christmas are “The Middle Watch,” “The Matriarch,” “A Hundred Years Ago,” “The Berg,” “Nine Till Six,” “The Fourth Wall” and “The Windmill Man.”

Here indeed real community work is being done. The company gives the whole of its services without payment, a playgoer's club is flourishing, and there is a spirit about the whole that cannot fail to be healthily infectious.

JOHN BOURNE.

BARNET ARTS CLUB

“Shall we join the ladies?” was chosen by the Barnet Arts Club for their first production of the 1931-32 season and although one might have hoped that this progressive club would have attempted something rather less hackneyed and a little more satisfying, a very sound performance was given. Most of the players got the right atmosphere from the rise of the curtain and the general level of the acting was definitely good. At the back of the gallery every line could be heard even from those characters whose backs were to the audience—surely worth commenting on in these days of mumblers.

The Producer, Mr. Robert Newton, wisely spread his cast out well at the table and thus avoided the clattering-up that frequently spells failure to this awkward piece. The result was that the Barnet Players seemed at their ease throughout and the play became less of a round table conference and almost as vital as it reads. There was plenty of contrasting characterisation without any forcing. If Mr. C. Wonters Smith as the host, and Mr. C. R. Lear as the butler had been a little more sinister (since this is melodrama in spite of being Barrie) our blood might have boiled. As it was, it only just simmered. Why the company took a curtain call all pointing at the host is still a mystery.

JOHN BOURNE.

V.D.S. SCHOOL AT CIRENCESTER.

It is doubtful whether a more ideal spot than Cirencester will ever be found for a V.D.S. school. Beautiful in itself and rich in history, it is surrounded by some of the most perfect villages in England.

But of course, Miss Kelly and Mrs. Wheeler, not to mention Mr. Martin Browne and Mrs. Wilson, didn't allow you much time to gaze at Cotswold Manors. They kept you much too busy rehearsing, and learning about scenery and lighting and “noises off,” and about walking, sitting, kneeling, and even falling—adequately and not too painfully—on the stage, and many equally important things. But there were times, too, when you just sat still and revelled in the efforts of other people,—as, for instance, when you listened to Dr. Bottomley talking on “Poetic Drama,” and afterwards to Mrs. Penelope Wheeler, who stirred you to the depths of your being with extracts from “The Trojan Women”; or to Miss James, who, backed up by three children from her village, filled you with an urgent desire to make a wooden pipe and play on it yourself. And at the end came a performance of the two Hans Sachs plays,—(translated by E. Oulless) “The Old Game,” and “Dame Truth,” when a large audience obviously enjoyed themselves,—particularly at the unexpected entry of a noisy rabble, armed with frying pans and what not, who rushed up the centre of the vale in full cry after poor Truth. Another audience watched in reverent silence Mr. Browne's beautiful nativity play, and many of the players felt inspired to go back to their villages and produce it themselves this Christmas.

IDA GANDY.

INDUSTRIAL PAGEANTS

Mrs. Katharine Pole has brought to the notice of the League that suggestions have been made, in more than one quarter, in regard to Pageants definitely designed to illustrate or promote various Trades and Industries, and the welfare of the work-people engaged in them. Pageants have been an increasing feature of town and country life in England since the war, and this idea of the application of pageantry to industrial development, reminiscent as it is of the Guild plays of the Middle Ages, seems to the Council of the League an idea well worth supporting.

As a preliminary to future action, the Council has decided that it would be helpful to institute an enquiry into the Pageants which have been recently held, so as to obtain information which would be valuable to those who may be contemplating Pageants, industrial or otherwise, in the future. We should, therefore, be grateful if any readers of these lines who have had to do with a Pageant in their own locality would be kind enough to assist us in obtaining the necessary information. The particulars most needed concern the author of the Pageant, when it was held, what music was used and the cost thereof, the cost of a Stand and Costumes, etc., Producer's fees, money taken, price of seats and profit and loss, number of performances, any comments of organisers.

Mrs. Eric Stratfield, of Windmill Corner, Eastbourne, has kindly consented to collate the information which may be forthcoming, and it is hoped, later on, to publish the results of the enquiry.



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